

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

by Elmer Wurth

(After the revival of religious activities in China, in the post-Mao period, Nanjing Theological Seminary of the Chinese Protestant Church sent its first Church worker, Ms Julia Chang to further her studies in the U.S.A. She was interviewed by Rev. Elmer P. Wurth, a research member of our Centre, during her studies at Maryknoll, New York. Our readers will be interested in her warm and encouraging thoughts).



Julia Sung Chang, preparing to join the staff at Nanjing Theological seminary, is presently at Maryknoll, New York upgrading her skills before returning to Nanjing to help Dr. K. H. Ting as librarian and in other capacities. She is perhaps the first Church staff person from China to do graduate work in the U.S. in more than 30 years.

The scholar-internship was arranged for Ms. Chang, the mother of two grown sons, by Fr. John Cioppa, former Maryknoll superior in Hong Kong and presently on the Society's general council at Maryknoll, New York, when he visited Nanjing University last year.

Ms. Chang, a vibrant and joyful Christian, is quick to explain her motivation for going to America. "I was sent as God's idea and so I

want to better my skills and return to work at the seminary to express my gratitude to God. I will work and study hard while abroad so that I'll be a part of enlarging the seminary's ability to reach out to more people and help them know God. While at Maryknoll I am working in the seminary and Sisters' college libraries and archives. I also work in the MOES (Maryknoll Overseas Extension Service). I have opportunities to read reference books and will be able to better order books for our seminary library." In addition she is taking courses at Pace University and Columbia University.

Ms. Chang found Americans very friendly to her. During our interview she cited several examples of kindness which impressed her deeply:

1. When she reported for her three weeks internship at the Sisters' archives, Mother Mary Coleman, former head of the community and presently the archivist, had a welcoming party for Julia. Eight staff members joined Mother Coleman for a special tea. Mother dressed in her finest for the occasion and wore a gold charm chain with the Chinese symbol for love. She told Julia, "I'm wearing this symbol to show how much I love the Chinese and especially to welcome you." After the course ended a farewell party was given for Julia.

2. "One day the Sisters sent a new Sister to show me the sights of New York City. It was a wonderful day paid for by the Sisters."

3. The lay mission family with whom she lives treat her like a member of their family and when she returns late at night by train, they meet her at the station.

4. Once when she left a shopping center after dark and could not find her way home, the first person who learned of her plight drove her home by car. The lady said that her husband had been with the U.S. navy in Shanghai during the anti-Japanese War and that she always felt close to the Chinese.

5. An especially touching incident occurred on her return from Boston by bus after having been taken there by car by some of her new friends at Maryknoll. An elderly lady befriended her and said that Maryknoll would be an expensive taxi ride from her stop. She gave Julia an envelope with money for the cab. Julia said "I refused the money, but I received the warmth of her heart which I'll remember forever."

"Because I had contact with Americans in China, I was used to their ways; nothing was really strange in my relationships in America. Everything is going OK! I think contacts and visits between Chinese and Americans where we can see how things really are, instead of just suspecting and judging each other, will really help friendships grow. I want to return to China and tell everyone how kind Americans have been to me and that we should return the kindness to our American guests. I want to do a

good job at my studies and in promoting friendships so that many others will have opportunities to communicate and understand like I have. I want to help promote exchanges so that Chinese and Americans can know and appreciate each other better. If we keep our hearts open to make good relationships, we'll have the opportunity to know and love each other, to learn from other's strong points, to offset one's weakness (取長補短). Chinese and Americans are nice people. Through exchanges, Americans can learn to appreciate our great culture, and our people can receive help in achieving our four modernizations more quickly."

When asked how she enjoyed living in a Catholic missionary community, Ms. Chang had some interesting comments: "I enjoy the Catholic Mass very much although my background is Presbyterian. I graduated from Mary Farnhan (Pure Heart) school and then went on to the University of Shanghai and St. John's University in Shanghai. At first I asked someone to take me to the Protestant Church in town each Sunday, but after attending Mass several times I felt very much at home. I realized that the Maryknoll community was praying to the same God I do, even using the same words and same Scriptures. Then I felt it was better to worship with my friends and they warmly welcomed me. I found the liturgies in English with guitars and hymns, with everyone expressing a wish for peace to each other, so much more joyful than when I visited Ziccawei cathedral before leaving China. I even told the Chinese delegation who visited Maryknoll that they should encourage the Catholics in China to learn from the Americans whose liturgies are so much more intimate, close to the people and easy to relate to. It is important for the Chinese Mass to become more lively and vivacious."



As a closing remark, Julia said: "Don't worry that you can't come to China now as missionaries. One year ago I never dreamed I'd be doing graduate studies in America, but here I am! We need time to know and understand each other better. Then the problems and barriers will cease and all will be well. Let us do everything we can do to develop friendships between our two peoples."